

Hepatitis B Prevention among Asians and Pacific Islanders

Fact Sheet

January 2001

What is hepatitis B?

A serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. Hepatitis B may lead to serious damage to the liver, including cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer, and death

How many people are affected in the U.S.?

- 200,000 new infections occur each year. Half of the people with a new infection do not have any symptoms and can unknowingly spread this infection to others
- About 1 million people are chronically infected. These people “carry” the virus in their blood for life. People with chronic hepatitis B often feel fine and may not know they have hepatitis B
- About 4,000-5,000 people die every year of liver disease related to chronic hepatitis B

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by direct contact with the blood and body fluids of a person with hepatitis B, including:

- Household contact with a person with hepatitis B
- From a mother to her baby during the delivery process
- Sexual contact with an infected person
- Injection drug use
- Occupational exposure such as an accidental needlestick

How can hepatitis B be prevented?

- Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective in preventing the disease. It is the first anti-cancer vaccine. Hepatitis B vaccine includes a series of 3 shots usually given over 6 months. Unfortunately, hepatitis B vaccine is not effective if the person already has hepatitis B
- Do not chew food to share with your baby
- Do not share anything between household members that may get blood on it, such as a toothbrush, razor, or nail clippers

Why focus on Asians and Pacific Islanders (API)?

- Hepatitis B infection is much more common in people who live in or were born in parts of Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and South America. API immigrants and refugees living in the U.S. and their descendants also have high rates of hepatitis B
- As many as 15% of API immigrants living in the U.S. and their descendants are chronically infected with hepatitis B, whereas less than 1% of persons in the U.S. of non-API descent are chronically infected
- API children are at great risk of becoming infected; however, studies have shown low immunization rates for older children who were born before routine hepatitis B immunization started in 1991. At least 50% of older API children still need to receive their hepatitis B immunization

API Task Force on Hepatitis B Immunization

- The “National Task Force on Hepatitis B Immunization: Focus on Asians and Pacific Islanders” was created in 1997 to improve hepatitis B immunization levels and to reduce the incidence of hepatitis B among this population
- The Washington State API Task Force was created to prevent hepatitis B among Asians and Pacific Islanders locally because Washington State has the 7th largest number of API residents in the nation
- Current activities of the Task Force include: 1) development and distribution of educational materials on hepatitis B prevention among APIs, 2) conducting hepatitis B immunization and testing clinics at local Chinese Language Schools, and 3) conducting outreach to media serving the API community in Washington State about hepatitis B prevention among APIs

Resources

For additional information on

- ❖ The API Hepatitis B Task Force, please contact: Trang Kuss, Washington State Department of Health at 360-236-3555; or Shelly McKeirnan, Public Health-Seattle and King County at 206-296-4717.
- ❖ Hepatitis B in the API community, please contact: Trang or Shelly as listed above, or Anthony Chen, MD, International Health District Clinic at 206-461-3930.
- ❖ Internet resources: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/b/index.htm>,
<http://www.immunize.org/genr.d/quesfreq.htm>,
www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize,
<http://www.metrokc.gov/health/>
- ❖ Information and Referral Services, please contact Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies at their toll free number, 1-800-322-2588.
- ❖ Hepatitis B and you and your family, please contact your health care provider or the local health department in your county.